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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPOULOS

1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the
January 22, 2009, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in
Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

The United States welcomes Special Representative
Christopoulos to the Permanent Council. We appreciate the
Greek Chairmanship's ongoing efforts to restore stability
now, to protect Georgia's territorial integrity in the
future, and to find a way to maintain an OSCE presence there.

We believe the OSCE plays a critical role in Georgia, and
fills a unique niche that would make it difficult to replace.
Its recent work to help restore gas deliveries to Tskhinvali
is just one example of the OSCE's valuable contributions,
which demonstrates its ability to produce results. Its
monitoring officers provide information on the situation on
the ground, with special emphasis on security around the
South Ossetian region of Georgia, helping to deter
destabilizing actions and promote dialogue. Its staff offer
direct assistance in democracy, human rights, rule of law,
and economic development activities, and represent the
collective wisdom of all 56 participating States in
implementing fundamental OSCE commitments. The OSCE's
extensive experience and contacts allow it not only to offer
insight on the immediate and long-term impact of the
conflict, but also to provide input in the search for lasting
reconciliation and comprehensive solutions.

If the OSCE no longer had a presence in Georgia, its vital
role as mediator, monitor, project implementer, and policy
advisor would be sorely missed. Its absence would remove an
important intermediary voice, possibly increasing the
likelihood of direct confrontation in a still-tense
atmosphere, and would limit our ability to build confidence
and resolve what remains an ongoing conflict.

We remain concerned about repeated incidents of violence in
the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, which
underscore the need for an OSCE monitoring presence with
uninhibited access throughout Georgia. As recently as
January 16, a Georgian policeman was shot and killed in the
Georgian-administered village of Knolevi, gunned down from
South Ossetian territory under Russian control. At least 10
other Georgian policemen have been killed, and many others
wounded, subsequent to the August conflict, and kidnappings,
banditry, ethnic cleansing, and attacks on Georgian officials
and property continue. Credible reports suggest some of
these attacks have involved rocket-propelled grenades and
highly specialized sniper equipment) an alarming indication
of the potential for further violence. These actions are
unacceptable. We call on Russia to use its strong military
presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite this
violation of the August 12 and September 8 cease fire
agreements, to help to prevent these destabilizing actions.

In this environment, a continued OSCE presence in Georgia is

especially important, not only to help deter violence, promote human rights and encourage dialogue and reconciliation, but also to monitor the implementation of the August 12 and September 8 agreements brokered by French President Sarkozy. We continue to urge Russia to implement fully its commitments under these agreements, which clearly state that Russian forces are to withdraw to pre-conflict positions. In particular, Russia continues to maintain forces near the town of Perevi, in the Akhalkalaki region, and in the Upper Kodori Valley, areas that were never controlled by Russia or the separatists prior to the August war. We note that Russia reiterated these commitments to withdraw even after its destabilizing decision to recognize the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent.

We are prepared to support the basic approach advanced in the Greek package, and look forward to receiving more details of the three elements of the proposal.

We stand ready to work with the Chairmanship on a means to ensure a continued OSCE presence in Georgia. The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman.
CLINTON